

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid Many cultures around the world celebrate a girl's first menstrual period and initiation into womanhood with traditional ceremonies and feasts.

Q. Is it safe to have sex during menstruation? I'm really concerned for a friend who has done this before. I believe it's unhealthy, and that they should wait a week to have sex. What do you think? Is it harmful?

A. Menstrual fluid itself is not harmful. Having sex with a healthy, un-infected woman during her "period" is not dangerous. The key word is "healthy" and by that we mean uninfected with HIV or other sexually transmissible infections. We know that blood can carry infections such as hepatitis, HIV and other diseases. If a woman doesn't have any blood-borne infections, then having sex during menstruation is not dangerous – it's simply a personal choice.

Menstruation is the natural function of a non-pregnant female when the lining of the uterus is lost or "shed" because it is not needed to support a growing embryo or fetus. It typically occurs 14 days after ovulation and lasts three to five days. In some cultures, menstruation is accepted as a routine bodily function or even a spiritually powerful condition. In others, the predominant view is that menstruation is a negative, embarrassing, or dirty condition to be avoided and hidden from others.

Taboos surrounding menstruation and sex have existed since the times of the Old Testament. In the ancient Hebrew tradition, menstruating women were considered unclean during days of bleeding and for a week afterwards. Sexual intercourse during menstruation was absolutely forbidden. This belief is still customary in many cultures throughout the world.

While sex during menstruation isn't for everyone, if your friend and sexual partner(s) are clear of STDs (negative laboratory tests), mutually monogamous, and enjoy sex during menstruation, there is no reason to delay or avoid intercourse.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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